

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS DJIBOUTI 000291

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE PASS TO AF; AF/E; AF/PD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [DJ](#) [ET](#) [KPAO](#) [KO](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [YM](#)

SUBJECT: ENGLISH CONVERSATION GROUPS: WHY WE CARE

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Public Diplomacy's effort to implement weekly conversation groups in each of the city's 12 private night schools, has revealed not only the strong desire of Djibouti's youth to learn English, but also the importance of engaging these students who span ethnic, religious, economic and gender groups and geographic boundaries in the Horn of Africa. END SUMMARY

2. (U) In the past several years, Djibouti has seen a surge in numbers of students enrolled in English classes at the city's private night schools. School directors believe this is a direct result of the increased American presence in Djibouti and the potential associated economic benefits for those who can speak English. Students at these schools, which are located in most neighborhoods in the city, are a diverse mix of neighborhood residents, and generally fall between the ages of 17 and 40.

3. (SBU) In January PD began to implement a plan to establish English conversation groups at each of these schools in response to requests made by a wide range of Djiboutians for the American Embassy to provide some means for Djiboutians to practice English. The PAO began by engaging directors at each of the schools through her contacts with the English Teacher's Association of Djibouti, a non-profit professional group nurtured to maturity through cooperation between the Public Diplomacy section and USAID. In addition, PD approached Camp Lemonnier and requested CJTF-HOA develop a list of volunteers willing to participate in these groups as native English speakers. The PAO and the Office of Strategic Communications at CJTF-HOA (J3) have been working to address force protection and security issues that accompany this plan.

4. (SBU) In addition to providing native English speakers for each of the groups, PD chooses reading materials, generally simple articles from Voice of America, and provides copies in advance to each of the groups to serve as conversation topics for the following weeks. In this way, the US Embassy directs the topics covered in the groups in a way consistent with US policy and goals. PD is currently negotiating with Radio Television Djibouti to develop an English language radio show which highlights the same topics on the same schedule to maximize the project's reach.

5. (SBU) Post believes the English conversation groups serve three primary MPP goals. First, they encourage mutual understanding and promote a positive American image in the community. Second, they encourage additional interactions between the American Embassy Officers, U.S. military personnel and Djiboutian citizens. Third, they subtly promote American beliefs, values and policies, not only in the course of conversation but also in the reading materials.

6. (SBU) Post notes that these schools are an excellent entry into a diverse Djiboutian society. During one group, it was revealed in the course of conversation that three of the 13 students at the group are also students at the Yemeni Madrassas (Koranic schools), five routinely spend summers with their families on the Ethiopia/Somalia border, and one is deaf but lip reads English. Very few other Embassy projects can reach such a diverse audience and at no cost.

RAGSDALE